



## Dancers in the lobby before or after Nutcracker performances

(Memo: November 21, 2023)

It has been a long-standing GCB protocol that dancers are not allowed in the Montana Theatre lobby before or after Nutcracker performances — whether in costume or street clothes, full performance hair or not. Last year, however, the GCB Board became aware that there was inconsistent understanding of this policy among our current parents and dancers. The board, artistic team, and production team revisited this issue in detail during its annual post-production meeting (in Jan 2023) and continued subsequent follow-up discussions during regular monthly board meetings. After careful consideration, the board unanimously voted (in Oct 2023) to continue its policy of not allowing dancers in the lobby (under any circumstances) before or after performances.

For those seeking to better understand the rationale behind this decision, here are some thoughts from Michele Antonioli (2023 Assistant Artistic Director):

“As a former director of GCB and *The Nutcracker*, I have strong thoughts about why I do what I do! We have a responsibility to our dancers. We train, nurture, love, challenge, and provide them with appropriate choreography, beautiful costumes, and fantastic sets. We have the best theatre for dance in the region to present our ballet and we have a board that provides all the needed support for our dancers and audiences. To our audiences, we give beautiful dance (including delightful, well-trained amateur dancers plus professional guest artists and actors), Tchaikovsky's exquisite score, and a chance to be a part of a fabulous tradition. The thing I hope we give to everyone and the thing I hold sacred and the thing that keeps me coming back year after year is our chance to make magic — the chance to give audience members the tools that would allow them to suspend disbelief and watch snow fall inside, thrill to giant rats and toy soldiers waging fierce battles, butterflies and flowers dancing, and beautiful ballerinas in gorgeous tutus spinning unbelievably on their toes. Little girls who have never been in a dance studio yearn to learn all the things needed to be *Clara* someday... this is magic. When we rehearse for two hours to have 120 performers arrive silently onstage — in under 30 seconds — for our final bows when the curtain closes... this is magic. When we spend time and money to make fog appear onstage... this is magic. When we watch a Christmas tree grow, angels floating, and a bird freed from her cage... this is all part of the magic.

When we as choreographers have done this for a few years, and our children have participated and parents have worked backstage for a few years, we all might lose sight of the magic to some degree. I believe we should do everything possible to preserve this magic — it is an essential part of our mission. When a child sees *Clara* — the most beautiful, magical, ballerina — chatting in the lobby after the show in her everyday clothes, a little magic is lost. When the beautiful *Snow Queen* — who should be wearing her glittering tutu and tiara and pointe shoes — shows up with her hair down, in jeans and Sorel snow boots, to get a hug from a fan, the magic is diminished.

My desire to ask performers to stay out of the lobby after the show is primarily based on my desire to preserve what magic we can. There is little enough of it in the world. It is not asking too much to require dancers to meet and greet guests at the stage door (as is common across the world). At the stage door, those who wait to meet someone have made their peace with the suspension of magic. They want to say thank you to their loved ones, good job, and get a quick hug. That is a different kind of magic — also important, but manageable in a few minutes at the stage door. Help us to keep the magic alive for those who have never been to *The Nutcracker* or to a live ballet performance. It is one of the greatest gifts that theatre can give us all.... we are allowed to watch beauty, to *sigh* when the snow falls, to feel the thrill of music and movement beautifully crafted into a unified moment of glorious art and to do it together — in our shared humanity.”

In addition to Michele’s compelling perspective, the following is a summary of other points made in favor of continuing to ask that all cast members *please* not enter the lobby before or after any Nutcracker performance:

- GCB aims to provide a professional level experience for our dancers and audience members as compared to what might be expected during local dance recitals (which tend to be less formal).
- GCB strives to set policy and procedures that are fair and equitable for all cast members. With a cast size over 100, it would be challenging (congested) for all performers to be in the lobby greeting friends and family. The board collectively decided it is not fair to allow certain dancers or groups of dancers to gather in the lobby as an exception.
- GCB maintains liability insurance coverage for the rental of the Montana Theatre and has liability for all dancers on the premises (even if checked out by a parent).
- In the best interest of our cast, parents, staff, and volunteers, GCB encourages everyone to go home as quickly as possible to rest.
- GCB would need to pay extended UM staff time to manage crowds and clear the lobby after the productions. Our own volunteers and GCB staff would be impacted by delays in clearing the lobby.
- Dancers are responsible for cleaning up after each show and properly putting away, or setting costumes and accessories, in preparation for the next show. If their focus is on rushing to the lobby, there may be an impact on our Dressing Room volunteers.
- Families are able to arrange another meeting location (i.e. FINN) if inclement weather prohibits greeting dancers as they exit the “stage door” (which for our purposes is the 6<sup>th</sup> Ave door used when dancers check in and out).
- GCB volunteers (especially those serving as ushers) are parents doing their best to clear the lobby in a timely fashion as instructed. They should not be responsible for policing dancers in the lobby who knowingly, after being reminded, have disregarded this protocol.

GCB has made every effort to consider the full impact of making a change to this policy. Ultimately, we believe our current protocol remains the most appropriate — even if it may not be a popular decision with every family.

Thank you for your awareness of this policy and understanding the larger picture for Garden City Ballet.

Respectfully,

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